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FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2060
INFO RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0707
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 3623
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 0035
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 3812

S E C R E T ROME 000529

SIPDIS

ISN/CPI:FELIPE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2019

TAGS: PREL ETTC PARM IT

SUBJECT: IRANIAN-ORIGIN VEHICLES STILL IN ITALY, BUT MAY BE RELEASED

REF: STATE 45230

Classified By: Acting DCM Barbara A. Leaf for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is an Action Request, please see paragraph 4.

¶2. (S) Emboffs met with Emanuele Farruggia, MFA Director for Arms Control and Non Proliferation, on May 6 to deliver reftel demarche concerning Iranian-origin vehicles destined for Syria, which Italy detained in 2006. Farruggia acknowledged that the GOI had stopped the shipment and was still detaining the goods. The shipment has been held at the Gioia Tauro port. He said that the MFA originally had "some hesitation" about the shipment, judging it to have military characteristics, with Hezbollah the likely end-user. Nevertheless, Farruggia said an inter-agency committee (MFA, the Ministry of Trade and the General Staff of the Armed Forces) recently determined (over the protests of the MFA) that the shipment was not military-related, and had recommended release of the goods for onward shipment to Syria.

¶3. (S) Farruggia said that although the decision had been made to release the goods, they still remained at the Gioia Tauro port in Italian custody. He termed himself personally opposed to the release but said that up until now the Italian government had lacked a sound legal basis to continue holding the vehicles. However, in light of reftel information, Farruggia told Emboffs he would request a new review of the shipment and will request that the decision to release the goods to Syria be reversed. Farruggia believed repeated protests by the Iranian government was the impetus for the recent review of this case after nearly three years in limbo.

¶4. (S) Acting DCM has a follow up meeting with MFA DG for Multilateral Affairs Luca Giansanti next week, and will reinforce our request that the Italians continue to hold the suspect vehicles. Farruggia has told us that any additional evidence the U.S. could provide that would clearly demonstrate that these vehicles either have a solely military use or have been specifically modified for military purposes would be decisive in ensuring that the GOI does not release the shipment now or at a future date. Post requests any additional information available that might be shared with the GOI supporting the classification of the vehicles as electronic warfare vehicles, and any other information indicating that these are specialized military vehicles. Post requests this information by OOB May 12.

DIBBLE